



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



GOV. NOEM ASKS VA SECRETARY TO NOT BETRAY OUR VETERANS

In a letter to United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough, Governor Kristi Noem asks the Secretary to reconsider the VA's recommendations to close and downsize veterans' healthcare facilities throughout South Dakota. You can read the letter [here](#).

"These recommendations would severely impact the care of the veterans in South Dakota and surrounding states. I would like to state my strong opposition to these plans. Frankly, these recommendations represent a betrayal of our veterans who offered to sacrifice life and limb to protect us and our freedoms," wrote Governor Noem.

The Governor pointed to South Dakota's rural nature and the fact that centralizing care will cause many veterans – especially tribal veterans – to have to travel long distances for care. She also cited the promise made by the VA in 2020 to protect the veterans hospital in Hot Springs – and the fact that this plan represents a betrayal of that promise.

"I look forward to further conversations on how these short-sighted recommendations do not reflect the best interests of our veteran communities. I expect that the VA will approach such conversations with an open mind and open ears. And I hope that we can eventually come to a solution that shifts these recommendations and prioritizes the healthcare of the men and women who sacrificed so much to defend us and our freedoms," Governor Noem concluded.

Governor Noem previously criticized the Biden Administration for this proposed betrayal of our veterans, and you can find that media release [here](#).



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SDDVA CALL FOR ACTION—WE NEED TO HEAR FROM OUR VETERANS

Recently, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released its health care facility recommendations to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission. These proposals are the first step in a multi-year process. Under the law, all VA proposals are required to be reviewed by the Commission, the President, and Congress.

In 2018, the VA MISSION Act was signed into law. Among its many provisions, the law instructed the VA to review all health care facilities in its nationwide network. It also required the VA to make recommendations for proposed changes to the AIR Commission.

For South Dakota, the report shows the following proposals for the east river footprint: reduce emergency room capacity to urgent care in Sioux Falls, continue expansion of outpatient services, add 30 nursing home beds, and close the Wagner community-based outpatient clinic. For the VA west river footprint, the recommendation is to add a new VA Medical Center and Community Living Center in Rapid City, relocate psycho-social rehab from Hot Springs to Rapid City, change existing Hot Springs and Fort Meade campuses to outpatient care only, and relocate all Hot Springs and Fort Meade in-patient services to Rapid City.

Here is the timeline moving forward: the Commission will review the report, hold hearings, and submit their recommendations to the President. The President will review and approve/disapprove and submit the findings to Congress, which will have 45 days to respond. If approved, the VA will have to begin implementing the recommendations.

Some things that concern the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs include: would veterans be forced to rely on uncoordinated, private, for-profit care? Would veterans face long wait times for care? Would veterans be without the unique expertise and integrated services that only the VA provides? Would veterans pay more out-of-pocket expenses? Would providers wait months for reimbursement from the VA?

Our veterans faced many challenges while serving our country – hostile environments, exposure to toxins, intense heat and cold, dehydration, sandstorms, sleep deprivation, lengthy deployments, multiple deployments, survivor's guilt, missing family milestones, and more.

Our veterans wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America," for an amount up to and including their life. They fought our wars, defended our freedoms, and protected our way of life. Let's make sure we are fighting for them and protecting their way of life. It is our nation's solemn obligation to provide veterans the health care, services and support they have earned.

Before Congress and the President implement any recommended changes to VA medical services, we need to make sure these changes are in the best interest of our veterans and their families. Cost should not be the factor.

(Continued on next page.)

SDDVA CALL TO ACTION (CONTINUED)

That's why we need to hear from our veterans about their thoughts, wishes, and needs for medical care. Are we as a country meeting those needs?

We ask that you share your thoughts by writing us at:

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs
425 E. Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501

Or, by emailing us a message. Go to our website: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/aboutsddva/contactus.aspx#general>, and scroll down to general inquiries and click on the email button on the right side.

At the end of each day, our true measure of success will be the timeliness, the quality, and the consistency of the services provided to our veterans. They deserve nothing less.

To all those who have faithfully served, we thank you!

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



NEW LOCATION FOR SIOUX FALLS VET CENTER

The Sioux Falls Vet Center will be moving from its current location at 3200 W 49th Street in Sioux Falls to 5020 S. Broadband Lane—Suite 100, on Monday, March 28.

Their mailing address will be 5020 S. Broadband Lane—Suite 100—Sioux Falls, SD 57108. Their phone number will remain the same—605-330-4552.

The Vet Center will be closed March 24 through March 29 in preparation for the move and may have limited access to phone and email services during the transition. If you need assistance during this time, please call 605-728-3118 for Vet Center staff or 1-877-927-8387 (1-877-WAR-VETS) for the call center.

SON FOLLOWS FATHER, FAMILY'S LINEAGE OF MILITARY SERVICE

The son of a former South Dakota National Guard soldier is following in the footsteps of his father by becoming the newest member of the organization he once served. Connor Briest, son of Sgt. Corey Briest, of Yankton, was sworn in to the SDNG during an enlistment ceremony at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Sioux Falls, March 11.

Connor enlisted in the same occupation and unit his father was in 17 years earlier, as an artillery crewmember in the Yankton-based Bravo Battery (formerly Charlie Battery) of the 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion.

While Connor and Corey share a similar story to many other fathers and mothers whose sons and daughters also join the National Guard – what makes their story unique is the challenges their family has had to overcome.

Corey was severely injured during an IED explosion that also claimed the lives of several SDNG soldiers while serving on a deployment to Iraq in 2005. Despite his injuries, Corey made a remarkable recovery. Connor, who was just a year old when Corey was injured, grew up experiencing the challenges his father and family would face in the years to come.

Despite a traumatic brain injury which left Corey with limited mobility, vision and speech, seeing his father's resilience and call to service was a motivating factor for Connor to join the National Guard.

"I want to honor my dad for one," Connor said of why he joined the SDNG. "I've always wanted to do it, since I was very young. I'm pretty excited to serve my country and follow my dad."

"This is something he has always wanted, and we are proud to support him and the decision he is making," said Jenny Briest, Connor's mother and Corey's wife. "As parents, we sat down and talked to him and wanted to make sure why he was joining, and he has very good reasons of doing it."



(Continued on next page.)

BRIEST (CONTINUED)

“Connor knows first hand of what the sacrifice is and what comes with the commitment that he is making, because this is all he has known since he was little,” Jenny added. “But Connor also sees the brotherhood of [the National Guard] and what this can do for his life.”

Connor, like Corey, joins the SDNG during his junior year of high school and will attend Basic Combat Training later this summer, followed by his Advanced Individual Training after graduation next year.

While Connor said he is excited to begin his service, his future plans also include attending Mitchell Technical Institute to be an electrical power lineman following his military training.

Connor is not only following his dad into the SDNG, he is also following his family’s lineage of military service.

“Both Corey’s and my grandpas served, Connor’s step-grandpa was in the same unit as Corey, and many of our uncles also served, so we have a pretty good family line of service,” said Jenny.

As Connor took his oath of enlistment, making the moment even more special was having his father there to witness his commitment to our state and nation.

Although Corey’s speech is limited, Jenny says Corey thinks its pretty neat Connor is in the same unit with the same occupation as he had. “Corey says he feels honored that he is joining, he’s pretty proud of him,” she said.

While Corey is proud of his son and his decision to serve, Connor feels the same about his father.

“My dad is a hero of mine, and he made one of the greatest sacrifices possible for our nation,” Connor said.



GOVERNOR NOEM PROCLAIMS VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Governor Kristi Noem, in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, is proclaiming Tuesday, March 29, 2022, as "Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day." The governor and Department are calling on all South Dakotans to recognize the courage, service, and sacrifice of the men and women who served during the Vietnam War.

Some defended as ground troops in a combat capacity in country, some were a mile offshore on a Navy ship providing fire support, and some were air support. Others provided the necessary support roles in Vietnam, at nearby posts, and back in the States that were vital during the foreign engagement. All who served were affected in some way by their experience.

"More than 27,000 South Dakotans served valiantly during the Vietnam War. Of those, 210 South Dakotans made the ultimate sacrifice," said Governor Noem. "Through the establishment of an annual statewide Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day, South Dakotans can express their appreciation and honor the men and women who served during the Vietnam War by thanking them for their courage, devotion, and sacrifice."

"Those who fought in Vietnam are part of us and part of our history," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "They performed with a steadfastness and valor that veterans of other wars salute, and they are forever in the ranks of that special number of Americans in every generation that the nation records as true patriots. Our Vietnam Veterans fought for freedom in a place where liberty was in danger."

"On this special day, we encourage our fellow Americans to join us in remembering and honoring those who served during the Vietnam War with the gratitude and respect that they deserve," said Whitlock.

Welcome home!



GOV. NOEM SIGNS MILITARY AND VETERANS BILLS INTO LAW

Governor Kristi Noem signed legislation to improve readiness capabilities for the South Dakota National Guard:

[SB 41](#) revises the appropriation for the construction of a National Guard Readiness Center in Sioux Falls, for the purchase and exchange of property between the state and the Sioux Falls Development Foundation.

[SB 48](#) makes an appropriation for the redesign and renovation of the Wagner Readiness Center.

[SB 49](#) authorizes the Department of the Military to construct a cold storage building located in Rapid City, South Dakota and makes an appropriation therefor.

“Our South Dakota National Guard is the best in the country for our readiness capabilities, and these facility enhancements will further improve on those capabilities,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Our men and women in uniform deserve the very best, and we will continue to support them with our thanks, our prayers, and with the resources they need to be successful.”

Governor Noem also signed additional military and veterans bills into law:

[SB 63](#) revises the appropriation for road improvements to the State Veterans Cemetery and provides for ordinary operations of the cemetery.

[SB 197](#) requires the POW/MIA flag be displayed in the Senate and House of Representatives chambers.

[HB 1273](#) authorizes the Department of Military to purchase certain real property in Chamberlain.

WALWORTH AND UNION COUNTIES NAME NEW VSO's

Robert Bader has been named the new Walworth County Veterans Service Officer. Earlier this month, the Commission selected Bader after Stephen Volk had resigned.

Bader will be in the office Monday through Wednesday from 9:00 am—2:00 pm. His email address is walworth.vso@live.com.

Lisa Schenzel has been named the new Union County Veterans Service Officer. Lisa will be in the office Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 am—5:00 pm. Her email address is ucvets@unioncountysd.org.

Please join SDDVA in welcoming Robert and Lisa into the veteran network.

VA TO AWARD MILLIONS IN GRANTS TO IMPROVE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FACILITIES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is awarding 36 capital grants totaling approximately \$64.7 million to community organizations under VA's [Grant and Per Diem program](#) to improve the quality of housing options for veterans experiencing homelessness.

The new awards will allow grantee organizations to construct new buildings and renovate existing transitional housing facilities that provide more than 900 beds nationwide for homeless veterans.

The funds will also decrease mass housing and create more individualized unit-style living, thereby improving personal safety and reducing risks associated with close-quarters living.

"The Grant and Per Diem program fills a targeted role in [VA's evidence-based approach](#) to preventing and ending homelessness by ensuring veterans facing housing crises have safe and healthy accommodations during their path to permanent, stable housing," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "These grants allow the VA, alongside community partners, to amplify efforts to reduce homelessness and to protect the dignity of our most vulnerable veterans."

The GPD program has provided community-based transitional housing with supportive services for veterans since 1994 as they transition back to permanent housing. View previous [GPD grantees](#) and details about the program, and information about the [current state of Veteran homelessness](#).

These grants are supported with funds authorized through the [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#) and are a part of limited series of [capital grants](#) designed to continue relief efforts in response to COVID-19.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mar 26—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior Lutheran Church (909 W. 33rd Street)—Sioux Falls—8:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
- Mar 26—Rapid City Rush Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser “Chuck a Puck”
- Mar 29—Culver’s Regional Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight
- Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 6—Groundbreaking Ceremony for Gold Star Families Memorial Monument—(Veterans Memorial Park)—Sioux Falls—3:30 pm (CT)
- Apr 8—Purple Up for Military Children**
- Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City
- Apr 15-18—State Offices Closed
- Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
- May 10—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room in the Care Building in Rapid City (321 Kansas City Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- May 11—SDDVA Mini Conference—American Legion Post 8 Cabin in Pierre (520 S. Pierre Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 12—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings City Library—Cooper Room (513 3rd Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9
- May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)
- May 14-15—Ellsworth AFB Air Show
- May 30—Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery (25965 477th Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
- May 30—Memorial Day Program—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home —(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot Springs—10:00 am (MT)
- May 30—State Offices Closed
- Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10
- Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds (3200 W Havens Avenue)—Mitchell
- Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls
- Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
- Jun 18—Midwest Honor Flight 3rd Reunion—Sioux Falls Convention Center—11:00 am (CT)
- Jun 25—Lake County Abate Poker Run for Midwest Honor Flight
- Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls



UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Aug 18-23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City
Aug 22—The Barrel House Day of Giving fundraiser for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
Sep 10—Heroes Helping with Horsepower Military Appreciation Event—W. Main Street—Ethan—Festivities begin at 8:00 am (CT)
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Fifth Annual Hangar Dance—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

UPCOMING EVENTS

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